

SECTION
1

Trails West

One American's Story

In the 1824–1825 hunting season, trapper **Jedediah Smith** was leading a party through the Rocky Mountains when a grizzly bear attacked. The bear mauled Smith's face and partially tore off one ear. One hunter later remembered.

PRIMARY SOURCE

“[Smith] said, '[G]o for water and if you have a needle and thread get it out and sew up my wounds around my head.' . . . I told him I could do nothing for his ear. 'Oh, you must try to stitch it up some way or other,' said he. Then I put in my needle and stitched it through and through.”

—Jim Clyman, quoted in *The West*, by Geoffrey C. Ward

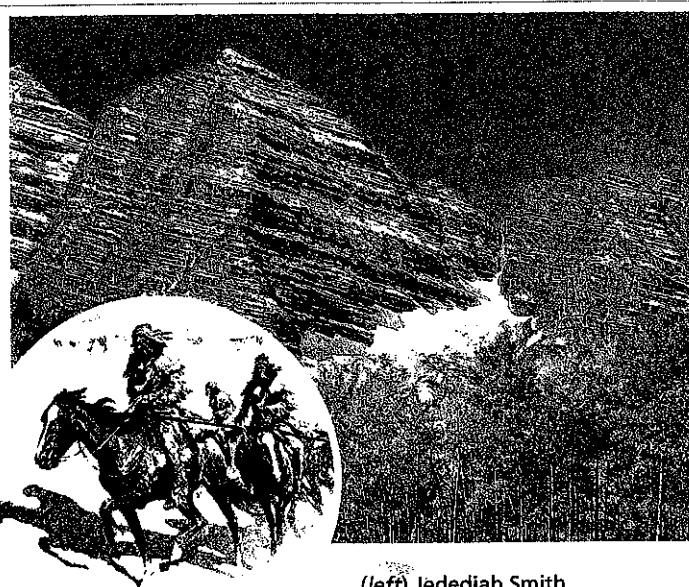
Ten days after the attack, Jedediah Smith set out again. This time he found what he was looking for—a pass through the Rocky Mountains. Smith and other daring fur trappers and explorers were known as **mountain men**. They opened up the West by discovering the best trails through the Rockies. These trails were later used by thousands of pioneers who moved west. Smith died while leading a wagon train on the Santa Fe trail in 1831.

The Early Pioneers

KEY QUESTION What motivated early pioneers to journey into the rugged west?

Mountain men were among the early pioneers who journeyed into the vast region, largely wilderness, that lay beyond the Rocky Mountains. These men survived by being tough and resourceful.

Mountain Men Open the West Mountain men roamed the Great Plains and the Far West, the regions between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean, to trap animals for their furs. Some, like Jedediah Smith and



(left) Jedediah Smith was a true trailblazer, as shown in this desert scene by Frederic Remington. (above) Smith was most famous for exploring the Rockies.



History Makers

James Beckwourth 1798–?1867

Not much is known about Jim Beckwourth's family history. At the age of 25, he joined a group of fur traders going west and in time became a daring mountain man. For several years, he lived with a Crow tribe and earned the warrior name, "Bloody Arm." Later, he worked as an army scout and gold prospector. In 1850, Beckwourth discovered a mountain pass across the Sierra Nevadas that enabled thousands of pioneers and gold seekers to reach northern California. This pass is still called Beckwourth Pass. The Western Pacific Railway later used this route as a gateway to the West.

CRITICAL THINKING Sequence Events How did Beckwourth's discovery of a mountain pass change the future of California and the nation?



**ONLINE
BIOGRAPHY**

For more on James Beckwourth, go to the Research & Writing Center @ ClassZone.com

Jim Beckwourth, became famous for their adventures. Although perceived as rugged loners, the men connected economically to the businessmen who bought their furs.

One businessman, William Henry Ashley, created a trading arrangement called the **rendezvous** system. At a prearranged site, trappers met with traders from the East. There, trappers bought supplies and paid in furs. The rendezvous took place every year from 1825 to 1840, when silk came into fashion and the fur trade died out.

Many animals were killed off at the height of the fur trade. This forced trappers to search for new streams where beaver lived. The mountain men's explorations provided Americans with some of the earliest firsthand knowledge of the Far West. This knowledge, and the trails the mountain men blazed, helped later pioneers moving west.

For example, thousands of pioneers used the wide valley through the Rockies called South Pass. Smith learned of this pass, in present-day Wyoming, from Native Americans. Unlike the high northern passes used by Lewis and Clark, South Pass was low, so it got less snow than the higher passes. Also, because South Pass was wide and less steep, wagon trails could run through it.

The Lure of the West To many the West, with its vast stretches of land, offered a golden chance to make money. The Louisiana Purchase had doubled the size of the United States. Some Americans believed it was their right to take land away from Native Americans who inhabited the territory but did not own it.

People called **land speculators** bought huge areas of land. To speculate means to buy something in the hope that it will increase in value. If land value did go up, speculators divided their holdings into smaller sections. They made great profits by selling those sections to the thousands of settlers who dreamed of owning their own farms. Traders also

traveled west. Manufacturers and merchants hoped to earn money by making and selling items to settlers and markets opening up in new communities. Others went to find jobs or to hide from the law.

▲ **SUMMARIZE** Explain what motivated pioneers to undertake the hazardous journey into the rugged west.

Settling the West

KEY QUESTION How did settlers make the difficult journey west?

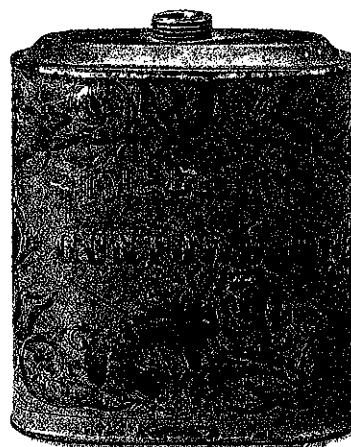
The success of early pioneers convinced thousands of families and individuals to make the dangerous journey west. They traveled along a series of routes that led to New Mexico, Oregon, and Utah. Once in these places, the new pioneers claimed the land and established settlements.

The Santa Fe Trail In 1821, Mexico gained its independence from Spain. Lands in the Southwest that used to belong to Spain now belonged to Mexico. Spain had kept Americans out of these lands, but Mexico opened its borders to American traders.

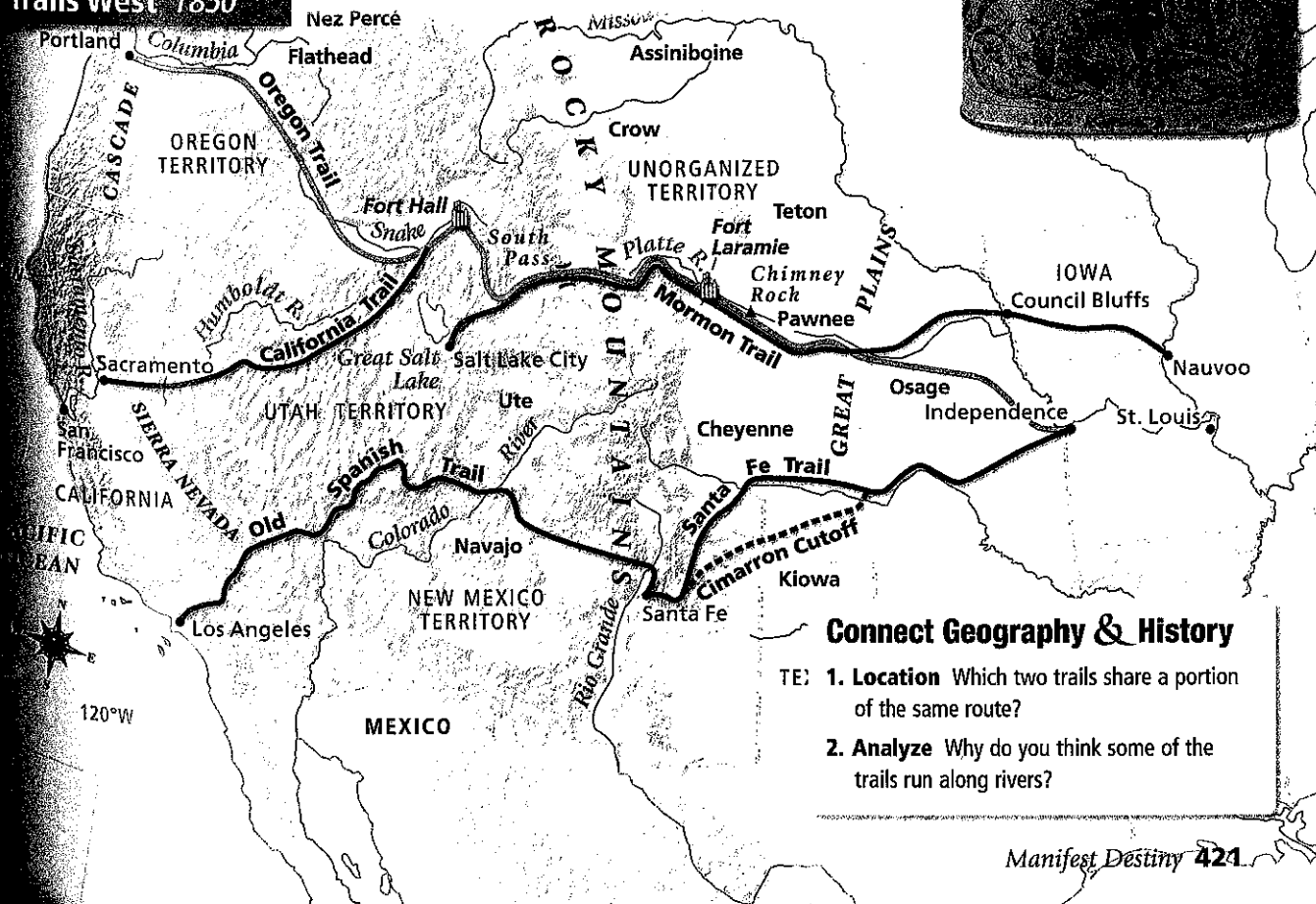
One adventurer who took advantage of this new policy was Missouri trader William Becknell. In 1821 he left Missouri for the customary route to Santa Fe, capital of the Mexican province of New Mexico. He made a large profit because the New Mexicans were eager for goods. Back in Missouri, news spread that New Mexico was a place where traders could become rich.

The following year, Becknell left Missouri with a group of traders and pioneered a new route that became the **Santa Fe Trail**. Goods were hauled by covered wagons—rather than by pack animals. Becknell knew he could not haul wagons over the mountain pass he had used on his first trip. Instead, he found a cutoff, a shortcut that avoided steep slopes but it passed through a deadly desert to the south. As his traders crossed the burning sands, they ran out of water and were crazed by thirst. Finally, the traders found a stream

Along with tools, cooking supplies, and a hunting rifle, a tin of gunpowder was an essential item on an overland journey to the West.



Trails West 1850



Connect Geography & History

- TE: 1. **Location** Which two trails share a portion of the same route?
2. **Analyze** Why do you think some of the trails run along rivers?

and pushed on to reach Santa Fe. Becknell returned home with another huge profit. Soon, hundreds of families were braving the cutoff to make the 800-mile journey from Missouri to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Oregon Fever Hundreds of settlers began migrating west on the **Oregon Trail**, which ran from Independence, Missouri, to the Oregon Territory. Among the first settlers to cross the continent to Oregon were missionaries, such as Marcus and Narcissa Whitman in 1836. The Whitmans made few converts among the Native Americans, but their glowing reports of Oregon began to attract other American settlers to the region. American settlement eventually led to conflict between Britain and the United States because Oregon was jointly occupied by those two countries.

Daily Life *On the Trail*

A Difficult Journey

For pioneers, the western lands held great hope. Following the trails promised new adventures. However, the journey was hazardous and filled with many challenges along the 2,000-mile route.

“The dust got deeper and deeper . . . Often it would lie in the road fully six inches deep, so fine that a person wading through it would scarcely leave a track. And when disturbed, such clouds! No words can describe it.”

—Ezra Meeker, pioneer

STRANGE BUT TRUE

A glass of water sometimes cost a lot of money on the trail.

Guess How Much!

\$1 \$5 \$10 \$20 \$50 \$100

Data File

- WHO** 350,000 pioneers between 1841 and 1867
- WHAT** 2,000 miles of trail across prairies, rivers, and mountains
- WHERE** Missouri to Oregon. (There were many other trails including the Santa Fe trail and the Mormon Trail).
- WHEN** early spring to avoid harsh winters
- WHY** lure of available land and adventure

CHALLENGES OF THE TRAILS

- Wagon trains traveled from dawn to dusk with only a short break for a noontime meal, for nearly six months.
- Wagons were often overloaded with supplies, forcing family members, including children, to travel by foot.
- Children gathered firewood; when none was available they searched for dry buffalo dung.

ANSWER: 001\$

Amazing stories spread about Oregon—the sun always shone there and wheat grew as tall as six feet. Such stories lured many people to the 2,000-mile journey to Oregon. In 1843, nearly 1,000 people traveled from Missouri to Oregon. The next year, twice as many came. “The Oregon fever has broken out,” observed the *National Intelligencer*, “and is now raging.”

The Mormon Trail Most pioneers went west in search of wealth, but one large group migrated for religious reasons. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, or **Mormons**, also moved west. The church was founded by Joseph Smith in upstate New York in 1830. The Mormons lived in close communities, worked hard, shared their goods, and prospered.

The Mormons also made enemies. Some saw the Mormon practice of polygamy—allowing a man more than one wife at a time—as immoral. Others objected to their policy of holding property in common.

In 1844, an anti-Mormon mob in Illinois killed Joseph Smith. **Brigham Young**, the next Mormon leader, moved his people out of the United States. His destination was Utah, then part of Mexico, where he hoped his people would be left in peace.

In 1847, about 148 Mormon pioneers followed part of the Oregon Trail to Utah. With about 1,700 who soon joined them, they built a new settlement by the Great Salt Lake called Salt Lake City. Because Utah has little rainfall, the Mormons built dams and canals. These structures caught water in the hills and carried it to the farms in the valleys below. During this same period, American settlers were also changing Texas.

 **SUMMARIZE** Explain how settlers made the difficult journey west.

Connecting History

Religion in Public Life

Today the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints thrives in Utah, where Mormons make up about 70 percent of the state's population.

Section Assessment



ONLINE QUIZ

For test practice, go to
Interactive Review @ ClassZone.com

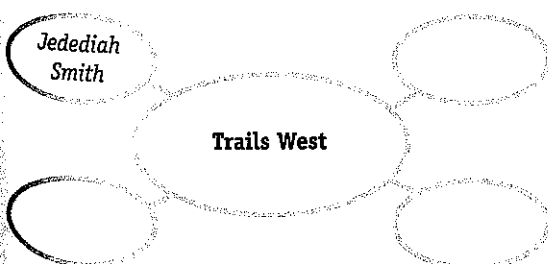
TERMS & NAMES

1. Explain the importance of

- Jedediah Smith
- Oregon Trail
- Jim Beckwourth
- Mormon
- Mountain Men
- Brigham Young
- Santa Fe Trail

USING YOUR READING NOTES

2. **Main Ideas and Details** Complete the diagram you began at the beginning of this section.



KEY IDEAS

3. How did the mountain men open up the West for future settlement?
4. What were some of the reasons settlers chose to live in the West?

CRITICAL THINKING

5. **Draw Conclusions** Of all the hardships faced by people who went west, what do you think was the most challenging?
6. **Analyze Causes and Effects** How do you think the pioneers' needs affected the local economy of Missouri?
7. **Draw Conclusions** How did the early Mormon settlers adapt to the desert?
8. **Writing Letter** Research a pioneer from this section and either write a letter from his or her point of view to a friend or write a journal entry and illustrate it with sights from the journey.